
TEN MINUTES

REFLECTION

ON THE

LATE EVENTS IN FRANCE.

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ON THE

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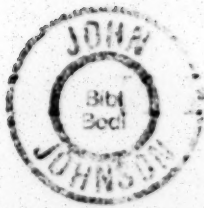
RECOMMENDED BY

A P L A I N M A N

TO HIS

FELLOW CITIZENS.

1792.



TEN MINUTES

REFLECTION, &c.

SOME time ago I used the freedom to address to you a very short plain paper, under the title of *Ten Minutes Caution*," against some doctrines which MR THOMAS PAINE and others were at great pains to inculcate. To any man who had leisure to think on the subject, and was disposed to think impartially, I believe that caution was not very necessary. The present paper stands perhaps more in need of an apology; it were indeed scarcely possible to imagine, that any rational person who had heard of the late events in France could be insensible to the feelings they must raise in every honest heart, or the reflections they must cause in every sound mind, did we not still see examples of individuals and societies, wicked or mad enough to countenance those proceedings, and to hold out to their countrymen the same sort of doctrines by which all this mischief in our neighbouring country has been occasioned. I believe those persons and Societies to be

as despicable in themselves, as their doctrines are pernicious ; yet I hope, my friends and fellow-citizens, you will forgive my anxiety, if while they are trying to mislead you by falsehoods and misrepresentations, I wish to mention to you a few reflections, which must, I think, strike every man of common sense and common honesty, on the present situation of that unhappy country.

I believe those advocates for the French Revolutions for, as might have been expected, they have not been contented with one) will hardly venture to shock British Humanity by *vindicating* the barbarities of the mob of Paris, though some of the newspapers, known by the name of *Opposition Papers*, have published what they call *Apologies* and *Palliations* of them. It will be difficult, I think, even at the Old Bailey, to find readers who can excuse murdering hundreds in cold blood, carrying their heads on pikes, mangling their bodies, and acting such horrible and beastly cruelties as none but cannibals were ever supposed to practise. These are not the writings, therefore, which any who knows the people of Great Britain will think it necessary to answer. But there are some men more artful in their attempts to mislead you ; who blame those barbarities, but vindicate the doctrines and principles by which they have been caused. It is of such principles, that a very little reflection on what has passed during the last three years in France, will, I think, sufficiently teach us to beware.

I am no philosopher, my friends ; but it seems plain enough to any man of common understanding, that in any country that has been civilized or governed at all, setting up the new and fanciful system of the *Rights of Men* as the rule of public conduct, is bidding farewell

well to any thing like Government or Law, Order, Peace, or Security. In any Society, except Government has power, no man can be free; because freedom in my neighbour to do me wrong may be liberty to him, but it is tyranny to me. Such has been the state of France for some time past; yet they have told us France was free all the time, because the tyrants that imprisoned, robbed, and murdered the people, were not Kings or Nobility, but were, on the contrary, what they call *Sans Culottes*, which may be translated, the *Tatterdemallians* of Paris, the very scum of the earth.

In every Society, except in the very woods of the savages, property and rank must be unequal, though the happiness they afford are more equal, I believe, than we are sometimes apt to imagine. The security of that happiness is the great point; if that is taken away, the value of the greatest and the least is equally destroyed. The only persons who can then have enjoyment in any thing will be those few desperate and abandoned men, who are too idle to have got any property of their own, and too worthless to have any consideration for their neighbours or fellow-creatures.

When people talk of Equality, which is a word much in vogue of late, I am afraid they generally think only of being equal to those who are now above them, not of those who are now below them becoming equal to themselves. Depend upon it, the desire of levelling will be at least as strong in the lower rank as in any of those above it. If tradesmen think it fair that they should be equal to Lords, (God knows they are generally much happier) their workmen will think themselves equally entitled to be on a par with them; and the honest workman who now
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brings up his family decently and comfortably on the profits of his labour does not perhaps reflect, that on this new plan of Equality, the sturdy ruffian who now begs a halfpenny from him at the corner of the street, may chuse to eat the dinner he has provided for his wife and children, or to knock him down with his crutch, if he refuses his consent to that proposal. The only man who can gain on this plan, is he who has nothing to lose; and they will probably get uppermost who risk nothing if they should fall. Such has been the case in France. The *Sans Culottes*, the naked blackguards, have been in truth the rulers of that miserable country. You know that in defiance of the pretended government of the National Assembly, these worthy gentlemen took upon them the disposal of the lives and properties of their fellow citizens, and after having amused themselves (sticking as the word is, I use it seriously) with murder one day, went about the next, stopping every decent person in the streets, and took from them whatever part of their property or apparel they thought worth taking. The National Assembly wrote high-flown decrees against this in vain; they would scarcely indeed wonder at what was a natural consequence of the rule of Equality and the Rights of Men, for which their Philosophers had written as high-flown decrees before.

But, say our reforming writers and societies; we do not mean in any degree to give birth to such confusion and disorder: we mean only to make Government what it ought to be, an instrument for the good of the people. So said the first reformers of France, and many of them I believe, said it sincerely, which is more than my knowledge of some of our reformers will allow me to believe of them. But have things in France turned out as those best of the Revolution-ists

its expected? Would they not have shuddered to think that such assassinations and massacres as have deluged Paris, and some other towns in France, with blood, could possibly happen in any land where common reason or humanity existed? Such, however, have been the effects of letting loose, under the idea of reformation, a spirit of revolution, and of contempt for order and good government. Suffer people once to shake off established government, and fanciful men to propose visionary schemes in its stead, and the greatest injustice and misrule will infallibly ensue.

It is, I fancy, not an easy matter even for the wisest and most virtuous men to *make* a Government for a nation. The old established Government, which is called the *Constitution*, comes on by degrees, as necessity requires, and as the situation of the people admits. But if the greatest Philosopher, or a set of the greatest Philosophers, sit down in their studies without that necessity, to invent or to mend a Constitution, it is a thousand to one they make a bungling piece of work of it. I am a plain man, and therefore may be excused a homely simile: If any of us wish to have a coat made, I think we should hardly say to our neighbour the taylor, who had served us well for many a year, "You are a bungler at your trade, and I will not employ you any longer; you follow the old vulgar practice of *taking measure*, which I am now too wise to submit to; I am to send for the *Professor of Anatomy*, who knows how a man is made by *Nature*, and he shall cut my coat for me of that perfect pattern which becomes it." I really think the French Philosophers have acted just as ridiculously; in the best of them this was only folly and vanity; in the worst of them it was knavery and wickedness.

I have lived to such an age, my friends, as to have had time to look about me with some observation,
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from which we can always judge, if we will not allow ourselves to be carried away by fine words. Tell me, upon recollection, have you often known any of those violent Reformers good for any thing as a merchant, a tradesman, or a manufacturer? Was his business thriving, his family happy, his servants or workmen well used and comfortable? Or was he not generally an idle, dissipated, vapouring fellow, harsh to his wife, neglectful of his family, a bad pay-master, and an unsafe dealer? The great Leaders of the French Mob were, I understand, just such men as these—men of fine tongues, but *black* hearts, whose persons nobody regarded, and whose characters every body who knew them despised; men, in short, who never could be any thing during the peace and prosperity of a country, but who were likely to be leading men when people were to be led to villanies and crimes. The more you know of their Friends and Associates in Britain, the more, I believe, you will discover that they are of a piece with those in France, in their characters as well as in their Doctrines.

MR PAINE and most of his Disciples, having no property of their own to take care of, are the more disinterested, no doubt, in their great care of yours: it is your money they wish to save by a Reform, which they tell you, will greatly lessen the public expences, which under the present establishment, press so hard on the bulk of people. I might make a short answer to this, by desiring them to tell us, if in any of those countries where, as they say, the expences of Government are much smaller, there is the same comfort, the same good living, among the bulk of the people as in England? the truth seems to me to be, that in every rich and thriving country, the expences of Government must be greater than in a poor one, because
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offices will not be executed well and honourably, nor will those who hold them have the respect that is necessary for executing them well, unless the salaries bear a proportion to the fortunes of the people around them. The French have become great economists in that way, and have cut down, in their short-hand manner, the salaries of different offices to a very small proportion of what they were. But what sort of people have they got to fill those offices, or how have they been executed? And even in the saving, I am told they have been sadly disappointed: according to our good old proverb, they have been penny-wise, and pound-foolish: it has cost them more to repair the ill done work of their new officers, than the highest allowance which English liberality would have made for the appointments.

I have heard some of my discontented neighbours talk of the hardships there was, that such and such a great man had so much a-year from the public, while the poor were so burthened as they are. Now, I very much doubt, whether in fact the poor contribute any thing to the payment of those great men's salaries. I have had a good deal of experience in that line, and I believe the workman is always paid for his work according to the rate which his living costs; and the taxes and burthens that his employers pay, are laid on the price of what they sell, over and above his wages. If there is a brisk sale for what he works on, he may get higher wages; if a dull sale, he will get lower, or he may want work altogether. The rich men that live round us make the sale brisk, and if they have their luxuries, we have our profits from them. But, as I take it, the Rights of Men, the Liberty and Equality we hear so much about, would soon set the workmen idle altogether. So I understand it has done
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in Paris; there indeed some of them have found other trades; they have become butchers of defenceless prisoners, grey haired old men, and helpless women and children. In Britain, thanks be to God, we have more worthy employments; and there never was a time when industry was better rewarded, when trade was brisker, manufactures more flourishing, or the country more thriving than at present. I trust it will continue so, notwithstanding all the pains our Reformers and Revolutionists take to make it otherwise.—Some of them, we know, have an interest against the prosperity of this country, and are therefore excusable in point of prudence, if they set humanity and goodness (as they can easily do) out of the question.—But what apology could we find for ourselves, if we should be seduced by those tempters to commit a sort of self-murder on our country? Even *Satan* himself did not tempt *Job* to suicide, till he was poor, and miserable, and sick, and naked. These modern Satans have the impudence to tempt us to the same sort of crime, when, like *Job* in his first state, our substance is great and increasing, when our sheep, our cattle, and our stores abound.

You will observe, my friends, that those French philosophers whom our Reformers so much admire, had nothing to restrain them but the risk they might run in this world. All belief of a God and another world they had thrown entirely aside. Are you willing, my friends, to part with this faith and hope, which to every good man is the great comfort of his life, which gives a higher relish to his prosperity, a stay and a resting place to which he can flee in adversity? Will you not scruple setting loose your families, your workmen, your customers, and your correspondents, from the awe of God and a good conscience, and of a future state of rewards and punishments? for the

the purposes of the French roth of August men this conversation was, no doubt, well contrived; they had overthrown the law and the government; they had only to efface the remaining check, the Deity, from the minds of their followers, and they could then be set to any thing.

I will not, my friends, do the French nation so much injustice as to suppose, that this madness, and wickedness, and impiety, are spread over the whole, or even any considerable part of it. I cannot bring myself to think so ill of any set of human beings. But that is just the misfortune of setting loose established government. A few desperate, abandoned men will then start up, and impudently call themselves the *People*.—The people, accustomed to have government act for them, and protect them, will sit still and submit to that handful of blackguards and ruffians, and suffer more from them in one week, than from almost the worst government in a century. Remember *Æsop's* fable of the sheep and the dog. The sheep complained that the dog fed on the milk that should have fattened their lambs, and that he chased them very roughly if at any time they strayed from the fold. "I never eat milk," said the wolf, "and as I like freedom myself, I will not restrain your's." The dog was dismissed, and the wolf, instead of the milk, eat up the lambs themselves. I think there are none of us so silly as not to apply the moral to these wolves in sheeps cloathing, who preach up the advantages of revolutions, and the expence of establishments.

It is against such men, my friends, that I wish you to be on your guard, and to take warning by the sufferings of our neighbours, how you listen to their arguments. Were this country even in the situation France was in formerly, (with many faults in her government, we will allow) you see what a dreadful change,

change, for the worse, the principles of such men might bring upon us. But as we are protected in our persons, safe in our property, with our country prosperous and flourishing, and every opportunity of our flourishing along with her, many of our equals, rising to the greatest wealth and influence, which are open to the lowest of us all, if they have industry or abilities to attain them ; while no man, however much above us, can do us the smallest injury or injustice unpunished ; can we think, without abhorrence and indignation, of any arguments that would persuade us to run the risk of exchanging all those blessings for such scenes as France has lately witnessed ? I leave it to yourselves (for I am no orator) to find out words strong enough for the wickedness of those who use such arguments, or the folly of those who can be misled by them,

FINIS,

